

Press Release WHO/35  
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## **MORE WHO MEMBER STATES UNITE IN FIGHT AGAINST SKIN CANCER CAUSED BY EXCESSIVE EXPOSURE TO UV RADIATION**

**Geneva** – The World Health Organization (WHO) welcomes the action by more and more Member States to adopt the Global Solar Ultraviolet (UV) Index. In recent days, Canada and the United States of America have begun using the Index (UVI), joining several other WHO Member States, to ensure that the UVI is used on a regular basis to educate people about the dangers of overexposure to UV radiation.

The UVI is an internationally-agreed and standardized measure of the UV radiation levels expected for the next day and is usually given in conjunction with local news and weather reports. In the UVI, as developed by WHO in collaboration with the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection, the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Meteorological Organization, UV radiation levels are expressed on a scale of 1 (low) to >11 (dangerously high).

“UV radiation contributes significantly to the burden of skin and eye diseases around the world. The Global Solar UV Index will certainly help raise awareness of the importance of sun protection and hopefully will have an impact on reducing the number of skin cancers and cataracts in years to come. In this context, the adoption of the UVI by countries such as Canada and the United States, where there is a strong 'tanning culture', is particularly welcome,” commented Dr Mike Repacholi, Coordinator of Radiation and Environmental Health at WHO Headquarters in Geneva.

With well over one million new cases of skin cancer diagnosed each year in Canada and the United States, the Global UV Index will not only help people become more aware of the importance of sun protection, but also help ensure a consistent approach to educating the public world-wide. Other WHO Member States already using the UVI are Argentina, Australia, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Mexico, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

“It is important that countries have a common standard for UV radiation reporting that includes advice for the public about sun protection. Given the large number of people who travel to different countries, travelers in particular will benefit from knowing that the same standard for UV reporting will apply world-wide,” added Dr Repacholi. “We will continue to work with countries to help them implement the Global UV Index and we are encouraged to know that other countries are also considering adopting the Global UV Index in the near future.”

Outside the tropics, the highest UV levels occur when the sun is at its maximum elevation, for example, around mid-day during the summer months. Altitude (the higher one is above sea level,

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the less UV is absorbed by the atmosphere), proximity to the equator and cloudless skies are also factors which increase UV levels. Shade is one of the best defences against UV radiation. During mid-day hours when the sun's UV rays are at their peak, finding shade is particularly important. If one has to be in the sun, wearing sunglasses, a wide-brimmed hat and protective clothing, and frequently applying sunscreen of Sun Protection Factor 15+ are all important protective measures.

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